

Letter to the Editor

22 September 2006

In response to Lyn Gautier's letter (*Money's not key to solving crime, Thursday September 21, 2006*), I have to agree that discipline is the key to solving or preventing youth crime, however, not the sort of discipline that Ms Gautier advocates. Beating and whipping our young people with any implement (Ms Gautier suggested a switch made from the stems of the rattan palms) is not appropriate in this day and age when all persons, with the exception of children and young people, have legal protection from this type of behaviour.

Additionally, I think Ms Gautier is confused about the meaning of discipline and punishment since they are used in the same context. They have completely different meanings, the one which she is advocating, clearly being punishment. A definition of discipline would be "the guidance of a child's moral, emotional and physical development, enabling them to take responsibility for themselves when they are older"

Beating kids only teaches them not to do things out of fear, they learn nothing about the impact of their behaviour on others nor alternative skills for managing a situation. They therefore do not develop inner discipline and a non acceptance of violence.

Terry Dobbs recent work clearly shows that when children are hit, as they grow older, so their acceptance and tolerance of this practice grows. Similarly, both the Gravitas research (carried out by S.K.I.P) and the Children's Issues Centre research (University of Otago) overwhelmingly show that positive discipline has favourable results long term and that physical punishment can have very damaging and long term effects.

These are three pieces of quality New Zealand research that cannot be ignored.

Our kids do need discipline, in the form of positive praise and encouragement, clear communication, teaching and guiding, rules and boundaries, consistency and consequences (that are non violent and respectful) and an effort on the part of parents to make their environment one that will enable them to succeed in society.

Having spent more than 20 years working with families I can tell you that a large majority of those in prison today were raised with violence and physical beatings and it clearly didn't work. You can't teach kids not to be violent by being violent to them, they learn so much more from watching us than they ever do from what we tell them.

Good role models and positive discipline is what they need and it needs to start happening from a very early age if we really want to address the rising crime and violence in New Zealand today.

Jean Ellerby